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ABSTRACT

An organizing framework is presented that can help integrate the large mass of apparently disparate work on written language. The starting point of the paper was collections of articles of reading, writing, and literacy, which seemed not to have a conceptual framework. Ways are discussed that knowledge from linguistics as an academic discipline and from other sources might be transformed into an educational research program. The problem of how the discipline might be reorganized into something new by linguists and educators working collaboratively is examined. The proposed organizing framework is referred to as the constituents of an educational theory of language, with specific reference to the British Association for Applied Linguistics conference. Two sets of points are identified as axiomatic: (1) the distinction between written and spoken language is an extreme idealization; and (2) a particular cluster of language characteristics (standard, written, formal) is fundamental to the British education system. It is suggested that the relationship between the social institution of the education system and the concepts of written and standard language must be analyzed. An educational theory of written language must include the following components: an institutional basis, a sociocultural basis, a developmental aspect, a way to handle descriptive information, a theory of language variation, a language policy and planning component, and ways to relate language studies to pedagogical and classroom practice. Each of these aspects of the theory is discussed in some detail. Contains 70 references. (LB)

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AN EDUCATIONAL THEORY OF (WRITTEN) LANGUAGE

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> 'A theory should generate the criteria for its evaluation, the contexts necessary for its explorations, the principles for their description and the rules for interpretation.' (Bernstein, in press)

The title of this paper is misleading in three respects, but a more accurate title would be excessively awkward or uninterpretable. First, it does not imply that I have an educational theory of written language to offer: but that I intend to discuss **the form that a properly constituted theory should take** in an area of applied linguistics. Second, for reasons that I will discuss in detail, the notion of written language is **not a genuine linguistic category**; so this phrase is in the title (in brackets) only in deference to the title of the conference. Third, I do not really intend to discuss a theory of written language, but what a **research programme** might look like and how we might judge rational progress in such a programme (Lakatos 1970). The real title of the paper is therefore 'Towards the proper form of a progressive research programme in applied linguistics' - but that would have been excessively awkward. A snappier title would have been 'From morphology to marxism' - but that would have been uninterpretable.

The starting point of this paper is very simple. I recently had to review three edited collections of articles on reading, writing and literacy (Stubbs, 1987, in press, a) and had great difficulty in making overall sense of them. I think this was due to the editors' lack of attempts at any synthesis or interpretation of masses of apparently only distantly related facts and theories. These three books contained inter alia articles on: the spread of printing in fifteenth century Europe; phoneme-grapheme correspondences in English, French and Dutch; developments in the syntax of Inuktitut since its use in writing. Some articles were about children, others were about adults; some were about L1, others about L2; some recommended action research, others were experimental; some

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were corpus-based, others purely conceptual; some were socio-historical, others psychological. They discussed data from several different education systems and from several different languages.

The editors of one collection say despairingly that the volume of research is 'awe inspiring' and that it is 'beyond the capacity of the editors to summarise or synthesise, or indeed even read' all the relevant studies. This may be true, but misses the main point that what is required is not just summaries, but some **conceptual framework** which could allow us to think coherently about such a volume of disparate work. The editors were not oriented to deep enough levels of interpretation and meaning. One very simple problem is the very wide range of different types of information and theory which require to be integrated. Collections of work on written language (eg Olson et al eds 1985) contain articles which go literally from phoneme-grapheme correspondences to whole societies; from phonetics to politics and from morphology to marxism. It is evident that research over this range must be a collaborative enterprise, involving linguists and educationalists, theoreticians and practitioners. But for genuinely progressive research, something more precise is required than a 'variety' of approaches, and loose notions of 'interdisciplinary research' (Olson et al eds 1985:4). More generally, programmes of applied linguistics conferences tend to have a rather random appearance (Crystal 1981:22), even if organised loosely round a theme such as 'Written Language'. One certainly could not work out from such programmes what applied linguistics **is**.

What is needed is not so much more research, but closer study of what is already known: some way of establishing criteria of importance in the mountain of inaccessible - and if inaccessible then useless - research. The continuous accumulation of printed material is, of course, itself a product of written language. In any case, knowledge does not grow from the mere accumulation of truths. The direction of progress in a science is determined by human creative imagination, not by the universe of 'facts'. And a **well planned** building of pigeon holes must proceed faster than the recording of facts to put in them (Lakatos 1970:187-88). Knowledge consists of organised structures of facts and theories.

In this paper I am going to propose an organising framework: what I will refer to as **the constituents of an educational theory of**

language.[1] With specific reference to the theme of the BAAL conference I will discuss what **an educational research programme on written language** might look like.

Before I try to set out this organising framework in detail, I will make two sets of points which I regard as axiomatic. First, **the distinction between written and spoken language is an extreme idealisation**. This is clearly demonstrated in a large body of work by Brazil, G Brown, Chafe, Givón, Nystrand, Ochs, Perera, Rubin, Tannen. (See also Hudson 1984.) These two polarised terms refer to clusters of characteristics which typically occur together, but which are logically independent. Thus written language is typically standard, formal, planned, edited, public and face to face. Whereas spoken is typically casual, spontaneous, private and interactive. (See figure 1.) But these clusters of features are not logically necessary: on the contrary, they are socio-cultural constructs which reflect beliefs about the functions of written language. In any case, the speech-writing relation is not historically stable. For example, mass literacy has affected our view of the relation; literacy encourages a particular kind of consciousness of language, and affects our view of spoken language along with our prescriptive notions of correctness. Speech-writing relations are historically specific and have been altered by radio, television and film, and more recently by access to computer based word processing and printing technology (Williams 1984:6). And forms of community publishing challenge mainstream views of the relations between written, standard and published language (see section 8). (Brice Heath 1983 and Street 1985 provide ethnographic analyses of alternative cultural views of speech-writing relations.)

If I had the space, I would try to place this set of dichotomies within a wider set of ideological oppositions. The pairs speech/writing and public/private are related to other oppositions such as nature/technology, arts/science, emotion/reason, and female/male.

The title of the BAAL conference, 'Written Language', is therefore just a rough label and not a genuine theoretical category. The speech-writing opposition hides interesting questions and requires to be deconstructed. I take deconstruction to be a critical practice: a series of methods for displaying the cultural assumptions which underlie such binary

oppositions. 'Written language' is just a folk term which has been taken over uncritically into education and linguistics. A genuinely educational theory has to see speaking and writing within the educational assumptions and ideologies held by society.

Figure 1: Typical configuration of features in spoken and written language, socioculturally expected but not logically necessary

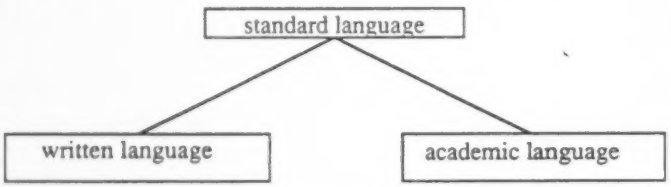
	spoken	written
interactive	+	-
face to face/spatial commonality	+	-
temporal commonality	+	-
spontaneous	+	-
private	+	-
informal	+	-
standard	+-	+

Binary oppositions have, of course, had special status in linguistics, particularly since the influential rhetorical practices of Saussure (langue/parole, synchronic/diachronic, etc). As a discursive practice, such dichotomous pairs have particular effects. They may reduce variation to binary opposition. They may reduce different kinds of difference to a single concept of oppositeness. For example, black/white, male/female, speech/writing do not encode opposites, but differences. And such pairs have to be learned: they are not self-evident. Nevertheless, as a way of organising knowledge, such discrete categories may acquire an independent ontological status, and seem to require only description and not explanation. (See Cameron 1985: 58)

My second set of introductory points is that an educational theory of language must involve a thorough analysis of the relations between the educational system, standard language and written language. For historical and social reasons, in Britain these three things are intimately related to each other (figure 2). **A particular cluster of language**

characteristics - standard, written, formal - is fundamental to the British education system. The education system and Standard English are mutually defining. SE is the expected and appropriate variety in the British education system. Conversely, the education system has been a major standardising force and a major source of the institutional authority of SE. SE cannot really be defined independently of its functions in schools and other institutions. There is a widespread perception that just to speak SE, to make certain sounds, is already to demonstrate one's education. And SE is often identified as public school or Oxford English (meaning the language of the university, not the town!).

Figure 2



The whole Western education system is thoroughly verbal and textual (Van Dijk 1981, Stubbs 1986a chapter 3). The place of written texts, writing and literacy have always been central, and in some contexts 'educated' and 'literate' are synonymous. But the high value placed on written language is a view with its roots in Western culture: it is not universal.

There is also a close relation between written and standard language. It is possible, of course, to have standard spoken language. But only written languages are ever fully standardised. And there is a very strong expectation that all written, certainly all published language is standard (though see section 8).

We require an analysis, therefore, of the relations between **the social institution of the education system** and the concepts of **written**

and standard language. (See Stubbs 1986a chapter 5 for an attempt at such an analysis of SE.)

My first main argument, then, is that an educational theory of written language must have **an institutional basis**: we have to look at the place of written language and literacy in educational and related institutions. Most writing is, after all, institutional and bureaucratic in its functions. The theory must also have **a sociocultural basis**. SE is a social dialect. It has been defined in this way within sociolinguistics, though I will shortly criticise some narrow sociolinguistic definitions of SE for their lack of any theory of society or of social institutions. Literacy is also a set of social practices which differ in different times and places (Brice Heath 1983, Street 1985, Cook-Gumperz ed 1986). And written language is taught, almost always explicitly and consciously: it is therefore always inherently involved in forms of social relations. (See Nystrand, 1986, for a detailed argument.) Such a theory will also be inherently **ideological**: institutions embody ideologies. And such a theory will involve a study of prescriptivism and authority. Inherent in the concept of a standard written language is the concept of its source of prestige and authority.

Such a theory will also have to be **developmental**. This is a matter of definition: education is about change within individuals. It will necessarily be involved with questions such as L1 and L2 acquisition, mother tongue education, the acquisition of literacy, and children's transition from spoken to written language.

In figure 3 I have set out a list of some topics to be analysed by an educational theory of language, plus some basic organising dimensions. I will give a slightly more detailed description of the components of the theory, and then illustrate it in detail with reference to the topics.

We need a great deal of **descriptive information** about the relations between spoken and written language, children's writing development, and so on. Some of this information is already available, but much is not. A description of varieties is in itself of limited value, however. We require also **a theory of language variation**: how varieties relate to the social structure, how they relate to different social classes or groups, and how language symbolises individual and group identity. Part of such

a study is inherently historical, given Labov's (1972) demonstration that synchronic variation is the observable aspect of diachronic change. Such a formulation already implies that language variation must be studied within institutions. An **institutional theory** of language, as I implied above, is really at the centre of what I am proposing here. (Halliday et al's 1964 proposals for an institutional linguistics have been taken up only in a very limited fashion. Milroy's 1980 work on social networks is extremely valuable here. And see Fairclough 1985 for other suggestions.) Educational institutions will clearly be central to the study, and that means we must also study **language policy and planning**: the ways in which literacy and language education more generally have been planned, and ways in which prescriptive attitudes to language have been developed. Government language planning is obviously of central importance given the effect of the Bullock Report (1975), the Swann Report (1985) and English from 5 to 16 (1984). Within the culture of individualism which is now dominant in schools (Hargreaves 1982:90), anything which smacks of social engineering is generally viewed with distaste by teachers. It is impossible to see, however, how an education system could be anything other than social engineering. In any case, the control exerted on the system requires careful analysis. Finally, we require to relate such studies to **pedagogical and classroom practice**.

There is no intended priority between these aspects of the theory. The linguistic is not intended to be privileged at the expense of the social or educational or vice versa. On the contrary, the claim is that any topic **must be treated from all five points of view**. If any single aspect is missing then the theory will be inadequate. What I am really proposing is a way of evaluating work in this area: a set of **criteria against which studies can be judged**.

There are more general organising principles underlying these five: not absolute distinctions, but tendencies. In the order in which I have briefly run through them, there is a move from descriptive to prescriptive, and from linguistic to sociological to psychological.

Figure 3

description .....explanation ..... intervention
descriptive ..... prescriptive
linguistic .....
sociological.....
..... psychological

example topics	1 description of language	2 theory of language variation	3 language in institutions	4 language policy and planning	5 pedagogy and classroom practice

1. standard/non-standard English
2. English spelling
3. writing systems
4. written/spoken language
5. literacy
6. school textbooks
7. dictionaries
8. literary/non-literary language ... etc

Note that a study of prescription is explicitly part of the exercise. Over the past sixty years, the strident demands for descriptivism in linguistics have in effect been a rejection of naive or ill founded prescriptivism. The real objection has not been to prescriptivism *per se*, but to putting the cart before the horse. The real objection has been to description based on *a priori* prescription. Presumably there is at least much less objection - perhaps there is none at all - to prescription based on prior description. Again, there is a cluster of related but distinct terms hidden in the extreme version of the descriptive-prescriptive dichotomy: see figure 4.

Figure 4

descriptive	prescriptive
theoretical	applied
explanation	intervention
understanding the world	changing the world

In any case, the claim to be purely descriptive and value free has often been spurious. For example, no-one has ever managed to define 'literacy' in a way which does not implicitly refer to purposes, and therefore to the value of literacy for individuals or societies. Literacy is always related to the cognitive development of the individual or to the socio-economic development of the society; and development is a prescriptive notion.

The rest of this paper is an attempt to classify and integrate the very wide range of things which are known about written language and to identify areas where basic knowledge is missing. The interpretation may be wrong, but it seems preferable to no attempt at all.

1. Standard English

1.1 Description. Clearly a great deal of descriptive work has been done, but much remains to be done especially of varieties of spoken SE. In addition, we still have only very scanty descriptions of non-standard

dialects of British English. (Edwards et al 1984 summarise a great deal of work.) Certainly the descriptions of non-standard dialects are not set out in an appropriate form for teachers and other educationalists. And some basic descriptive issues are unresolved. For example, Trudgill (1984, and elsewhere) claims that SE is definable with reference to its grammar and vocabulary, and that phonology is irrelevant, since SE can be spoken with any accent. R Coates (1982) has challenged this view and argued that there are standard accent features. For example, a word-initial /h/-less accent or an accent with intervocalic glottal stop in place of /t/ would be perceived as non-standard. Part of the problem is that descriptive definitions of SE have left out of account people's prescriptive perceptions. If speakers believe that some pronunciation features are non-standard, then this is part of the data. Prescriptivism must be studied as part of the phenomenon since standard languages are, by definition, prescriptively constructed.

1.2 Variation. Standardisation is logically related to language variation: there are variant forms in languages, some people think there shouldn't be, and try to select between them. Again, a lot of things are clear. SE is not a geographical dialect, since it varies only slightly (compared with non-standard dialects) in different geographical areas around the world. It is a social dialect. However, it is not adequate to define SE simply as a social dialect: it is an intersection of dialectal and diatypic varieties. It serves particular diatypic functions in education, in writing and in formal discourse. It is neither simply a dialect nor a style.

1.3 Institutions. SE maintains and is maintained by institutions: primarily the education system, publishing houses and the mass media. The spread of international English is obviously related to historical and economic movements and to colonisation. And a characteristic of recent international English is the burgeoning of institutional varieties of English with restricted purpose. (For a cultural and socio-historical account see Milroy & Milroy 1985.)

1.4 Planning. SE did not grow 'naturally'. It is the product of selections and decisions taken by men and women, sometimes individuals such as Samuel Johnson and Noah Webster, and sometimes groups such as teachers, publishers and printers. Most people have, however, lost sight of the means by which SE has been produced and is maintained. This

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naturalisation is an effect of institutional power. People treat SE as though it was a natural product and forget the ideological basis of its authority. Standard languages do not reproduce themselves, though they tend to deceive people into believing that they do; and this in turn is an essential part of their ability to operate as means of social control. The actual production of SE is mystified, ignored or suppressed, and it is seen as a finished product. For example, despite a certain amount of recent publicity given to Robert Burchfield, and anecdotes in the press about his very personal decisions which have led to the inclusion of some words in the supplement to the OED, these are treated as minor and likeable individual deviations: something he deserves after many years' work on an impersonal product. The source of **his** authority remains implicit, and the personal decisions of dozens of co-workers which pervade the dictionary are ignored (cf section 7 below on dictionaries). But SE is a construct and is therefore available for deconstruction.

1.5 Pedagogy. The pedagogical issues to do with SE have made disappointingly little progress. There are many studies of non-standard dialects showing that they are complex, systematic and functional. But this large body of work has been largely unable to generate a coherent pedagogical practice and theory, which would give teachers clear guidance on the place of standard and non-standard varieties in the classroom. Some superficially rational initiatives have largely collapsed: for example, the idea of publishing basal readers in non-standard dialects. Current pedagogical thinking seems to revolve around three principles: the responsibility to teach SE given its place as the dominant high prestige variety required in the job market; the pointlessness of attempting to teach spoken forms of SE, and the dangers of correcting children's spoken language given the relations between children's spoken language and their individual and group identity; and the strategy of teaching SE, therefore, in explicit relation to written forms and particularly to the demands of public examinations (see Richmond 1982, Milroy & Milroy 1985).

These comments refer mainly to teaching English as a mother tongue in British schools. With reference to teaching English as a foreign or second language overseas, there is considerable confusion over the issue of local standards (Indian, West African, etc). (Stubbs 1986a chapter 5 develops several of these arguments about SE in more detail.)

2. English Spelling

Spelling is the aspect of English which has been most clearly standardised. But despite its apparent simplicity in this respect, it raises several fundamental problems.

2.1 Description. Much descriptive work has been done on how English spelling works as a mixed phonemic, morphonemic and morpholexical system. But there are still many uncertainties over what would constitute the most consistent description, and over whether it is moving further towards a logographic system (as Sampson 1985 claims).

2.2 Variation. Spelling is the most highly standardised aspect of English, with hardly any permitted variation. On the other hand, there is great variation in the competence of individual users, which makes spelling different from other aspects of language usually discussed by linguists, and especially from phonology. In turn, the usage of individuals has hardly been described at all. Several studies have been published on children's invented spellings (eg Bissex 1980). But almost no descriptive work has been done on the wide variety of usages and practices which have grown up around the institutional system, for example: the incorrect spellings everywhere on notices and signs; the abbreviations used in newspaper small ads; the parodies of traditional spellings seen in house names; the spellings used in brand names for consumer products.

Williams (1961:245; 1984:217,254) has written about the 'orthography of the uneducated'. By this he means the literary convention by which, in novels, class and regional dialects are represented by **errors** in spelling. These misspellings are themselves conventional, and part of a wider system (which Williams does not analyse) in comics, cartoons and graffiti. For example, by a spelling such as 'wot' for 'what' an author might indicate that a speaker is ignorant or working class or both: although 'wot' could spell an educated middle class pronunciation. The assumption appears to be that the standard correct spelling corresponds to the standard correct pronunciation. A deviation from one represents a deviation from the other and therefore from educated middle class norms. A full analysis would be complex, but Williams is pointing to a cluster of prescriptive beliefs and literary conventions to do with

spelling, pronunciation, dialect, error, social class, education. A complex cluster of social beliefs and practices can be indexed just by an author writing 'wot'.

2.3 Institutions. Such observations make very problematic the prescriptive-descriptive distinction which linguists normally take for granted. There is a largely unexplored relation between the institutionally prescribed system controlled by publishers and the education system, and individual practice. And linguists appear to differ quite sharply amongst themselves on what the implications of these relations might be (see Stubbs, 1986b). The spelling system is one of the detailed and concrete ways in which power is exercised in society. It acts as a highly selective filter when people are trying to pass public examinations or get jobs; it is the focus of large commercial publishing enterprises and letters to newspapers; and it is debated in the House of Lords.

2.4 Planning. The spelling system is, *par excellence*, the aspect of language which many people would like to keep under conscious planning control, though plans for reform have obviously never been taken up in Britain. A thorough study of documents would be useful, for example publications such as the newsletter of the Simplified Spelling Society, to see to what extent such discussion corresponds with linguists' understanding of how the system operates. Prescriptive attitudes should themselves be a topic of study. This would be particularly valuable with respect to spelling, since there are quite deep disagreements over concepts such as 'error', 'rule' and 'regularity' in English spelling (again see Stubbs, 1986b).

2.5 Pedagogy. Despite a vast pedagogical literature, there is an unresolved current debate over whether spelling should be 'caught or taught', acquired or consciously learned. Current pedagogical debates over spelling are related to debates over first language acquisition and foreign language teaching.

3. Writing systems

Work on English spelling is often very ethnocentric and discussed in ignorance of what is possible and normal in writing systems for other

languages, alphabetic, syllabic or logographic. If I had space here, I would also illustrate the proposed classificatory framework in detail on writing systems in general. There is certainly still much work to be done on the **description** of individual writing systems, and on the **variation** across possible writing systems for human languages. This would include a theory of typology and a study of the relation between type of writing system and type of language. (See Sampson 1985 for a major start.) Writing systems have been legitimated by **institutions** in the wider community. These have often been religious, and the spread of writing systems has often been due to religious and political colonisation. The geographical distribution of major writing systems in the world - Roman, Cyrillic, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese - correlates with major economic, political and religious power blocs. There are many case studies available on **planning and policy**, for countries such as China, Haiti and Turkey, on the invention, reform and replacement of writing systems, or on resistance to reform. And the **pedagogical** literature is enormous: from attempts such as ita, to the possible cognitive effects of the Vai syllabary.

A case study of the Chinese writing system would show very clearly the inseparability of the dimensions of figure 3 above. In **descriptive** terms, the system is morphemographic: characters represent morphemes. This morphemographic system allows a wide **variety** of otherwise mutually incomprehensible dialects of Chinese to be represented by the same characters. There is also variation within the system between traditional and simplified versions of the characters. This internal variation is related to the **institutional** uses of the system: for example, within the People's Republic, simplified characters have promoted some everyday handwritten usages to printed forms. And both these issues of variation are inseparable, in Chinese political terms, from issues of **language planning**. They relate to beliefs about the national unity of the language, and about the relationship between language policy and the material practices of the mass of the common people (Livesey 1986).

4. Written language

4.1 Description. Much description and conceptual work has been done recently, particularly on the syntactic differences between spoken and written English (for example by Brazil, G Brown, Crystal, Chafe, Givon,

Ochs and Tannen). (See Hudson 1984 for general discussion and detailed references.) Written and spoken English clearly share the same basic clause structures, but differ sharply in their derived structures (Halliday 1985:xxiv). Much of this work concerns the motivation for such differences in the different psycholinguistic processing required for written and spoken language. For example, the real time processing of spoken language requires a basic organisation in which one thing is said about one thing at a time, and this leads to topic-comment structures which typify spoken rather than written English.

There has also been increasing work on the influence of permanent written texts on surface syntactic structure. A basic hypothesis has been that languages develop overt formally marked subordinate clauses under the influence of their use in writing. The basic argument is that lack of shared context demands overt structures (eg restrictive relative clauses) to enable referents to be correctly identified (eg Kalmar 1985). However, hypotheses in this area have to be very carefully formulated. Deuchar (in Hudson 1983) reports that American Sign Language appears to be developing just such subordinating structures, as it comes to be used frequently on television. Since ASL is obviously neither spoken nor written, it is presumably the public, non-face to face uses of the variety, where users cannot directly interact with each other, which trigger the formal elaboration. In general, the most striking differences between spoken and written English are found in comparisons of informal conversations and formal expository texts, and differences are sometimes attributed to modality when they should be attributed to function (Nystrand, 1986). Again, this emphasises that the written-spoken distinction must be seen as **typical configurations of parameters, not as a binary opposition**.

In some cases, however, there is rather elementary descriptive work to be done. One cliché about spoken and written language is that spoken language is transitory and written language is permanent. In some ways, this is in any case false: written language can be altered or erased without trace, at least in drafts. With the arrival of word processing, the cliché is even less true. The relative stability of a written record gives way to a dynamic screen display. Written text can be altered, edited, reformatted with ease, leaving no signs whatsoever of any changes. The concept of a written text becomes profoundly different. Its present form is just one of

a possible series of transformations, some of which can be carried out automatically by programmed repetitive edits. A recent publication by NATE (1986) discusses some of the implications of this for teaching English as a mother tongue. But detailed descriptive studies require to be done on how such developments in technology are affecting the forms and uses of written texts. (See Bell 1984 for an interesting study of the effect of word processing technology on the form of newspaper reports.)

Another area where much basic descriptive work requires to be done is lexical density. Ure (1971) discusses the concept of the differing lexical densities of spoken and written texts, and provides much useful basic statistical data. The lexical density of a text is its relative proportion of lexical to grammatical words. Very briefly, one would expect a high proportion of lexical words in written language, which can be more highly packed with information. Ure reports on corpora of 42 000 words of spoken and written text. She shows a strong tendency for written texts to have a lexical density of over 40% (range 36% to 57%) and for spoken texts to be under 40% (range 24% to 43%). Using computational methods (reported in Stubbs 1986c), I have studied the lexical densities of some of the sub-texts of the London-Lund corpus of half a million words of spoken English. My figures are rather different from Ure's. Briefly, I found in this spoken data high lexical densities which characterise Ure's written corpus: from around 44% for telephone conversations to around 55% for radio commentaries.

This tells something about the corpus itself, on which two massive standard grammars of English have been based (Quirk et al 1972, 1985). The corpus is explicitly educated adult usage. The speakers are academics, doctors, politicians, secretaries, journalists and the like: that is, speakers whose spoken usage is doubtless influenced by written usage, and therefore not characteristic of the language of the majority of the population. Note again the empirical relation between written, educated, standard, academic usage. It has often been pointed out that linguists' descriptions are largely based on highly standardised, edited, consciously constructed examples, and are therefore characteristic of written rather than spoken usage. The common Chomskyan claim to be studying language independent of its medium of transmission is simply false. Many linguists' descriptions are based on a highly literate variety which lacks the degree of variability inherent in spontaneous unplanned spoken

usage. The very fact of basing a study of language on sentences biases the study towards units of written language. In this respect, much linguistics has not escaped the prescriptive pull of written language. (There are other more specific demonstrations of the ways in which alphabetic writing has led to a Western phoneme-based bias in phonological theory. For example, phoneme theory developed out of very practical concerns with systems of shorthand, spelling reform and foreign language teaching.)

This is probably the most important theoretical reason for studying thoroughly the relations between written, standard and educated norms of usage: that they have seriously distorted linguistic theory, even amongst those who claim to study language 'descriptively'. In its written and standard forms, linguistic behaviour is focussed, codified and institutionalised. Linguists are speakers of standard languages for obvious social and educational reasons. Writing has the analytic effect of focussing attention on forms and meanings out of context. Standard languages are, by definition, less variable than non-standard languages. And when linguists cite examples of language they are often carefully mulled over and edited, and therefore more like written language than spoken. The net effect of these various focussing forces is to make the linguist's concept of language a highly abstract one, not unlike the lay stereotype of a 'language'. One of the most thorough attacks on linguistic theory, along these lines, is by Le Page and Tabouret Keller (1985:202):

> 'linguistic theory tends to be ...conceptualised in terms of the standard forms of highly focussed languages'.

4.2 Variation. Compared to spoken language, written language is less variable. The suppression of variability points to the inherently conservative ideology underlying the construction of a standard written language.

For simple reasons, written language is better described than spoken. It is a body of texts and records, not behaviour, and is therefore open to observation. There is therefore a **logical relation between standard forms, written forms and description**. The concept of a language as a fixed objective system has been very productive in the history of linguistic analysis, but it is an ideologically loaded objectivist concept.

Williams (1977:26-27) has discussed the influence of written language on linguistic theory. Linguists are highly literate and linguistic studies derive historically from a highly literate tradition. Historical-comparative linguistics was based on a body of written records and depended on the study of classical European languages. Within linguistics it is changes in the concept of data which have led to profound changes in linguistic theory, and also to profound changes in the theoretical and ideological significance of linguistic variation. For example, when Boas, Sapir and Bloomfield argued for the priority of the spoken language, they were also making highly ideological statements about the value of Amerindian languages and cultures. Within linguistics, statements about speech-writing relations are in the nature of manifestos which go back into the history of linguistics as an academic discipline. Such statements characteristically mix logical, chronological and ideological arguments (Stubbs 1980:21ff) with positions to be fought over the institutional status of linguistics as separate from the study of classical languages. All theories are value loaded, and books, writing and literacy are central to modern conceptions of language, both lay and professional.

Closely related to the observer's paradox is the **describer's paradox**: that descriptions are likely to become untrue as soon as they are published. Descriptions of social reality become persuasive as soon as people become aware of them. For example, the attention that linguists have given to non-standard dialects of English, community languages in Britain, and British and American Sign Language has changed the status of these languages. Sometimes this has been the overt aim: to attack the notion that such language varieties are in any way 'primitive'. But they mean that **description becomes prescription due to dissemination** (Andreski 1974). This means that social scientists must at least consider the implications of their work being disseminated to the public: there is no such thing as pure research on language and society. The research may change the reality it purports to describe. And, again, any crude version of the descriptive-prescriptive dichotomy is seen as untenable.

4.3 Institutions. Written language makes a radical difference to the complexity of organisation that humans can manage, since it changes the relation between memory and classification, and allows many forms of

referencing, cataloguing, indexing, recording and transmitting information. Bureaucratic institutions, from small businesses to modern states, depend on written records. But a great deal of ethnographic work requires to be done within institutions, to study the channels along which messages are passed, and to give some substance to the broad generalisations which are often made about the place of written language in institutions.

An analysis of written language also requires to be placed within an analysis of signifying systems. The mere fact **that** something is written conveys its own message, for example of permanence and authority. Certain people write and certain things get written; though this is currently changing fast with the increasing use of word processing: typeset publications no longer have the same connotations as they had a few years ago. The relation between messages and forms of representation is not historically fixed, and such representations are themselves open to examination for the messages they convey. Illiteracy carries its own symbolic significance and stereotyped connotations of poverty and crime. Written language itself represents an orientation to the dominant mainstream culture: which is probably one reason why it is rejected by many pupils in their more general rejection of dominant modes of education and culture. (See analyses by Barthes 1973 and Foucault 1980 of the ideological context of literary production and consumption, and of the perceptions of the role of writers in contemporary society.)

Figure 5: Correlations, but no more, within English lexis

spoken	written
everyday	academic
common	specialist
frequent	rare
informal	formal
monosyllabic	polysyllabic
Germanic	Romance/Graeco-Latin
acquired	learned
active	passive
core	non-core

As a specific example of the way in which descriptive, institutional and pedagogical issues are inseparable in a study of written language, take the case of the English lexis. One crude but useful generalisation is that spoken language shows more variation than written language at all levels of description except lexis (Halliday 1985:xxiv). It is evident both that lexical elaboration/density of individual texts is higher, on average, for written texts; but also that the lexis of written registers is more elaborated for the language as a whole. This observation requires a **theory of lexical variation** for the vocabulary of a language: a theory of the differential elaboration of the vocabulary of spoken and written English. It seems to require essentially a theory of core versus non-core vocabulary. (In Stubbs 1986a chapter 6 I propose such a theory in detail.) But again, the dichotomies written/spoken and core/non-core demand deconstruction: see figure 5.

For well known historical reasons - 1066, Norman French, Latin and all that - the language of learning has a social class basis (Williams 1961:240). This broad split in English vocabulary is **institutionalised**. There is differential social class access to the non-core vocabulary, given the history of English and the way in which Graeco-Latin loan words have been used to build up the vocabularies of academic disciplines, medicine and the law. In addition, the way in which vocabularies have been elaborated to build up semantic fields in such areas of knowledge gives differential access to subjects on the school curriculum. (See Corson 1985 for a detailed argument along these lines, although I disagree with many details of his argument: Stubbs, in press, b). Again we have a case where a thorough analysis requires detailed linguistic description, a theory of linguistic variation, a conceptual analysis which deconstructs the written-spoken distinction, a study of social class and institutional usages, and a study of pedagogical issues of access to curricular knowledge.

4.5 Pedagogy. As with Standard English, this large and complex body of work on written language has led only to disappointingly imprecise prescriptions for teaching practice, but various principles do seem clear. I suppose we might expect wide agreement on Halliday's view (1978:234) that language education has to do with learning new registers, and that written language offers an extension of pupils' functional meaning

potential. We are dealing not only with forms, though these are important, but also with meanings. Since written language is characteristically taught, and not acquired naturally, it is immediately involved in new forms of social relations: with the teacher and also with distant or anonymous or hypothetical audiences. It has been pointed out that the work on writing by Britton et al (1975) inherently involves new forms of authority relations between teachers and pupils.

Further, once the written-spoken dichotomy has been deconstructed, it is evident that children learning to write have to make a whole series of related transitions: figure 6. This rather simple observation requires to be developed into a whole **theory of transitions** through which children have to pass in the education system, and related to the large literature on home-school transitions, and how such transitions may contribute to explanations of educational success and failure.

Figure 6: Transitions in learning to write

spoken	written
casual	formal
spontaneous	planned
private	public
non-standard	standard
L1	L2

Even the partly deconstructed series of transitions in figure 6 is not an adequate model, however, since it still implies a linear sequence: children learn spoken language and then written language. But work on emergent literacy shows that speech and writing develop simultaneously. In a literate culture, children learn some things about written language before they learn everything about spoken language. Writing affects speech. (And many adults learning a foreign language are already literate in their native language.)

However, the basic observation does lead to a whole series of practical pedagogical suggestions to the effect that children should not be forced to

learn too much at once. For example, Barnes (1976) emphasises the value of first draft writing: not forcing children to produce final drafts at the same time as they are trying to forumulate ideas. There is much discussion of the value of small group discussion as a semi-public preparation for writing. Richmond's (1982) recommendation that standard forms of syntax should be required only late in the curriculum under the pressure of public examinations also separates this aspect of writing from others.

5. Literacy

I do not have the space or the ability to deal with literacy or reading in general in this paper, and I will restrict myself to a key exemplar in Western education, namely school textbooks. Some of the key arguments about literacy, which are directly relevant to my overall argument, have been set out elsewhere. For example, Brice Heath (1983), Street (1985) and Cook-Gumperz ed (1986) show that literacy is not a neutral technology or skill, but a set of diverse social practices. What is regarded as functional differs at different times and in different places, and is maintained by different social groups and institutions. Literacy is not simply a single set of competences which have to be transmitted by schools.

6. Textbooks

An important topic for an educational theory of written language must be books used in schools. Written language, standard language, textbooks, teachers and the school all have perceived authority (Luke et al 1983). We therefore require an analysis of the ways in which this authority is expressed in language, and therefore of **the relation between linguistic usages and the authority of curricular knowledge**. Such an analysis would be part of a wider analysis of **the relations between written language, knowledge and power** (Foucault 1980). It seems evident in the case of school textbooks that there are relations between their forms of language, the institutions in which they are used, the social and intellectual control which they support, and the pedagogical practices which they assume. Although, as often, the linguistic mechanisms of power are not studied (Foucault 1980:116).

6.1-2 Description and variation. Much very valuable description has been done. For example, Perera (1984) has analysed the lexis and syntax of school textbooks which cause problems in comprehension for pupils. Some work on 'readability' (not Perera's) is rather narrow in its concepts. But beyond narrow readability formulae, there is also increasing work on the textual organisation of books (Lunzer & Gardner 1984) and therefore on ways in which knowledge is framed. Information can be represented, segmented or denied representation by the use of 'important words', summaries, comprehension questions or titles. Other analyses (Nystrand, 1986) show that readability is not a feature of the text in isolation. Different readers may find the same text easy or difficult, since readability depends on a balance between what is known and what is new, and therefore it depends on a social relation between writer and reader.

There are also now increasingly precise descriptions of the ways in which books for children construct a view of childhood itself. Books are written for audiences, and therefore embody assumptions about their audiences. These assumptions are therefore inseparable from assumptions about the nature of texts. For example, Freebody and Baker (1985) have studied some of the ways in which the first school books are a critical agent of socialisation. They have done detailed statistical analyses of a corpus of initial reading primers. They find that words referring to **children** are always sex-specific: the sex indefinite word **child** entirely fails to appear. The words **boy/boys** are more frequent than **girl/girls**. **Boy** is more likely than **girl** to be singular: that is, boys appear more often as individuals, girls more often in groups. Some verbs occur only with **boy/s** as subject; no verbs occur only with **girl/s**. It is clear that such use of language is itself constituting and legimating a concept of childhood.

A fundamental topic is 'how effects of truth are produced within discourse' (Foucault 1980:118, cf 131). School textbooks often present information as neutral or objective. Authors are assumed to be corporate or anonymous: there is a lack of an explicitly personal world view, identifiable and fallible (Cameron 1985:vii-ix). This may be a feature of the books themselves or of the way they are used by teachers, but authorship is often irrelevant to teachers and pupils (Luke et al 1983). However, writing is always aligned: it always expresses propositions

from a certain point of view. We therefore require detailed linguistic description and theory which shows how language is used to convey a writer's attitude to propositions: whether they are taken for granted as the expression of true, certain, neutral, objective, authoritative statements, or are hypothetical and tentative, personal and subjective. In order to study how ideologies are conveyed by texts, we therefore require studies of modality (Stubbs 1986c) or 'evidentiality' (Chafe 1985). Chafe claims that written and spoken English treat evidentiality differently, and this is confirmed by corpus-based studies. For example, J Coates (1982) found that epistemic modals were less frequent in formal, written language than in informal, spoken language. And Holmes (1983) found that lexical items marking degree of certainty constituted 3.5% of any text on average, but were only half as frequent in written language as in spoken. Tannen (1985) argues that such observations amount to an explanatory hypothesis to account for variation in many kinds of discourse, and represent a basic distinction between discourse which focuses on information and discourse which focuses on personal involvement. Brown (1978) has made similar suggestions.

6.3-4 Institutions and planning. School texts are highly selected and controlled by institutions such as examination boards. Texts may be selected by the teacher, distributed for the lesson, interpreted by the teacher or via another text (eg study notes), and then withdrawn. The amount of control over school textbooks, and whether this control is central or local, differs greatly in different countries: compare for example the central control in Germany versus the teacher's autonomy in Britain. The existence of books as material objects is controlled by publishing houses, who therefore also exercise control over content, form, dissemination and reproduction. The most extreme commercial control may be exercised by American publishers of basal reading courses: millions of dollars are invested in the market research and production of such reading schemes. Exact figures are not known, since they are not published: the commercial operations are treated as highly secret by the firms involved. We are dealing with officially and commercially sanctioned versions of knowledge.

An educational theory of school textbooks would therefore deal with the centrality of texts to Western education. It would note that each historical

genre of written text has served particular social and cultural functions: consider translations of the bible, novels, reading primers, textbooks and newspapers (Williams 1961). As new forms of written language, such as computer files and electronic mail, become available, they too come to be used to create new forms of social relations.

6.5 Pedagogy. The authority of textbooks as a source of curricular knowledge is related to the view that the meaning of a book is 'in' the text. However, students' interpretations of texts can be widely different under different classroom practices. Quite different views of knowledge are transmitted by the hidden curriculum of dictation, rote memorisation, oral recitation, explication de texte, silent reading or small group discussion. A basic distinction is between a student's unmediated reading, or a use of a text which is mediated by the teacher's 'expert' interpretation or by study notes. Again, the use and interpretation of texts in classrooms is inseparable from social relations.

So what would a theoretically coherent account of school textbooks look like, as an analysis of a particular use of written language in education? It would require a study of the forms of language which are used to convey authoritative meanings, and a study therefore of ways in which knowledge and power are constructed. Much relevant textual analysis has been done within the sociology of science and within English for Specific Purposes. Swales (1985) studies the scientific paper as a genre, to show how private notes are turned into public papers and manufactured as knowledge. Such studies in turn force the development of different kinds of linguistic description, since our present descriptions are not capable of describing the ways in which such meanings are conveyed.

A study of textbooks would also require a study of the theory of meaning implicit in them. There has been much discussion recently of two related themes: that written texts encourage the analytic separation of what the speaker/writer means, from what the reader means, and from what the text means; and the pedagogic view that literacy and/or schooling facilitates this detachment of language and thinking from the immediate context. (One of the most influential versions of these views is Popper's 1972 theory of World 3.) I do not think that anyone would now try to maintain an extreme version of the view that the meaning of a written text

is 'in' the text. (For example, Nystrand, 1986, has very thoroughly disposed of Olson's 1977 version of that argument.) In any case it is evident that different historical periods, different occupational/social/educational groups have made different assumptions about whether meaning is 'in' the text (Eisenstein 1985). There is the lengthy debate within literary criticism over the intentionalist fallacy. In contract law, arguments have to be based on what people actually say or write: one is committed to the words of the contract, not to what one claims was meant or intended - nevertheless, the interpretation of contracts depends on precedent. And for a famous and highly socially and politically situated view, there is Luther's statement that 'the meaning of the Scripture depends, not upon the doctrine of the Church, but on a deeper reading of the text'.

The question of whether the text is autonomous and relatively independent of context is logically related to other formulations: which aspects of language use are purely linguistic? and which depend on real world knowledge and on more general principles of rationality and inference? I assume that one has to reject the view that meaning is 'in' written text alone, and accept that meaning depends on reciprocal relations between writer and reader. However, it is still arguable that spoken and written texts convey different orientations to meaning, since the relationship is different in the two cases between: addressor, addressee, text, context of production and context of reception. Goffman (1981) has provided the basis for an ethnographic model which can account for different relations between an addressor and a message. Goffman points out that the concept of 'speaker' requires analysis. He distinguishes the **animator** who produces the actual vocal sound; the **author** who encodes the message; and the **principal** who is committed to what is said. In everyday conversation, animator, author and principal typically coincide. But a BBC newsreader is only animator, and a political speech writer is only author, and so on. Goffman points out, but does not develop the point, that written language facilitates the separation of speaker/writer from commitment to the message conveyed. Written texts are never context free. But they can be **re**contextualised in different institutional settings. Thus the technology of the media raises problems of interpretation.

I am arguing that we have the beginnings of a theory which could relate: linguistic forms and the meanings they convey about the authoritativeness of knowledge; socially and historically changing views about the relation of speech, writing and meaning; ethnographic studies of the uses of spoken and written language to convey different relations between speaker/writer and meanings; and pedagogic views about the effect of written language on thinking.

7. Dictionaries

Again, if I had more space I would discuss dictionaries as a particular kind of authoritative book which is central to education. As a genre, they have always been biased towards written language. Some are claimed as descriptions of usage, though they are typically regarded as authoritative and prescriptive by users. And dictionaries such as the OED which are based on citations from actual usage are based on selections from usage which places written language, and especially 'literature', above everyday spoken language. There is no doubt either that the definitions found in dictionaries display the bases of the particular social group who constructed them: mainly white middle class males. Their definitions are aligned. Their authority is social and political. They are a major agent in standardising the language. And they have a particular place in educational and other social institutions. (Cameron 1985:81-4 sketches the beginning of a feminist analysis of dictionaries.)

8. Literature

Again, if I had space, I would attempt a detailed demonstration that the relation between literary and non-literary language is also amenable to study along the lines I have proposed. Such a demonstration would involve: a description of the internal organisation of, and intertextual relations between, literary texts; a study of the historical construction of the literary canon (Eagleton 1983 provides a detailed argument); and a study of the relations between literary language and the standardisation of English (which is very explicit, for example, in the preface to Johnson's dictionary of 1755).

The direct link to my main theme becomes explicit if one looks at **the different possible relations between written, literary, standard and published language**. Gregory (1979, 1984, 1986) has studied these relations with reference to a large body of working class community published writing, as opposed to writing published within the dominant mainstream culture. His work is based on a large corpus, not only of the writing itself, but also of interviews with those producing it and historical data from earlier periods. His work amounts to a detailed deconstruction of often taken for granted assumptions about writing, publishing, social class and their interrelations. He assumes that social class is itself a relation: to means of production. Published writing is overwhelmingly in the hands of the middle class. Our traditional views of literature are permeated by assumptions about how literature is produced: which social groups write, and who publishes writing. (In a notorious case, Chris Searle lost his job as a teacher in a London school because he published the writing of a group of children.) Our views are also permeated with assumptions about the relation between individual creativity and writing, as opposed to collective or group writing. The view of the solitary, individual author was strengthened by Romanticism, but it is not a necessary state. Gregory takes pairs of terms in effect, such as those in figure 7, and shows that the traditional configurations are not the only possible ones. For example, there is group writing in non-standard English and published by collectives based in the community. Some of this writing has a close relation to oral history, though the expectation that prose documentary should be the appropriate genre for working class writers can itself become restricting. Gregory discusses these topics within the question of what would constitute a working class education.

Figure 7

written	spoken
published	oral
standard	non-standard
individual	group/collective/community
middle class	working class
establishment	resistance

If I had the space or the ability for a broader structuralist analysis, these themes could be related to the two deeply opposed views of mass education which were debated in the nineteenth century: on the one hand, that mass education would threaten the power of the middle and upper classes; on the other, that mass education was necessary for a modern industrial society. They could also be related to the opposition which is still being hotly debated in the twentieth century: between the social and individual aims of education (see Hargreaves 1982 chapter 4, Williams 1961). (And for different analyses of the dichotomies standard/non-standard, language/anti-language, establishment/resistance see Halliday 1978:178-9.) Issues of linguistic standardisation, written language and elementary literacy have historically always been realted to the orderliness of the worker in industrial society.

Concluding comments

In the immediate context of the BAAL conference, I have tried to provide an organising framework which can help to integrate the huge mass of apparently rather disparate work on written language, which can help to identify gaps in our knowlege, and which can help different bits of the puzzle to be fitted together. The notion of rational scientific progress applies only to a series of theories which are welded into a research programme. It is this kind of programme, rather than isolated theoretical statements, which characterises a mature phase of scientific work (Lakatos 1970).[2]

I have therefore discussed in this paper how knowledge from linguistics as an academic discipline and from other sources might be transformed into an educational research programme. I have tried to tackle the problem of how the discipline might be reorganised into something new by linguists and educationalists working collaboratively. The history of linguistics over the last seventy years has been a history of dichotomies which have been highly productive, but ultimately misleading. (See Wilkins 1982 on 'dangerous dichotomies' in applied linguistics.) I have tried in this paper to deconstruct a few more in a constructive way.

I have tried to convey just one underlying proposition though in the indirect, elaborated discourse of formal academic papers. I don't understand why 'Spoken Language' was the topic for the 1985 BAAL Seminar and 'Written Language' the topic for the 1986 seminar. What is required is an applied theory of **language** which is based on its different realisations in both modalities. The term **written language** does not represent a category with any descriptive or theoretical validity, since it confuses: a range of forms and functions, with a range of social practices, with some of the mechanisms of institutional power, and with pedagogical and everyday stereotypes.

Well, actually, that's not quite true: I think I do understand why such conference topics were chosen, and I have tried to provide an analysis of just that in this paper. But in doing so, I have argued that the category of **written language** is a socio-historical construct, and not a linguistic concept. I think this is why debates about written English, Standard English, English language and English literature, often crystallise very deep cultural conflicts.

What I am arguing for is a research programme which achieves a genuine synthesis of linguistic and cultural analysis. A large number of research projects ignore one or the other, or merely juxtapose them in an unintegrated way.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Tony Burgess for detailed discussion of this idea. In an MA course which they teach at the University of London Institute of Education, Tony Burgess and Jane Miller develop in detail an argument around this theme. See also Stubbs 1986a for further ideas on the form of such a theory.

2. Such a framework also has other functions. For example, the RSA Diploma in Language in Education is designed explicitly around essentially this framework. It was developed by myself, Peter Ali, Hilary Hester, Lynette Murphy O'Dwyer, Celia Roberts and Ming Tsow. I have also discussed elsewhere (Stubbs 1986a chapter 4) how a syllabus on modern English

language for schools can be based on essentially the same organisation.

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